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## GARBAGE AND RUBBISH

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**T**HE accumulation of garbage and rubbish is one of the penalties human society inevitably pays for the luxury of civilization. The immeasurable privilege human beings enjoy of living together in society carries with it the certainty of the inconvenience and sometimes peril involved in the presence of large aggregations of waste matter, animal, vegetable and mineral.

The distinction between garbage and rubbish and the various unsavory and unattractive substances connoted by these familiar terms, requires no more than the barest mention before such a company as this. Garbage may be roughly defined as waste matter, animal or vegetable, left over from the process of collecting and preparing food for human consumption, and of a nature so rapidly perishable as to involve offense or peril to human life. Rubbish may be taken to include waste matter of a less perishable sort, not particularly harmful in its nature, yet such as has served its primary purpose of contributing to human welfare and has now become useless, cumbersome and offensive. The vast proportion of such picturesque accumulations of terrestrial substance as are usually found adorning the back fences and alleys of our handsome city residences in the blooming month of May may be included in the word "rubbish."

In view of the rapidity and ceaselessness with which these accumulations of rubbish and garbage grow, it is evident that among the most important, if not the most exalted, of civic functions is the institution of some effective method by which they may be safely, speedily, frequently, and completely removed from the neighborhood of human habitations. This is important from two considerations. The first is aesthetic.

(1) They are offensive to human sensibilities. Nose and eye unite in perpetual protest against their presence. The house

through whose open doors and windows their heavy perfume is wafted is an undesirable residence. The yard or street or alley fanned by their zephyrs is shunned by all refined natures, except such altruistic souls as may be engaged in housing investigation. They are unsightly beyond almost any other form of offensive matter and their visible presence robs the fairest prospect of beauty and defaces the most elegant abode. That the constant presence of garbage and rubbish in the immediate vicinity of our abodes, and unceasingly laid before the eyes of our neighbors, our children and ourselves, reacts unfavorably upon the moral life and standards of our homes and neighborhood we need not now take time to discuss, for I believe it will be questioned by no one present.

(2) The second and perhaps the most urgent reason for the swift and effectual removal of these substances is, that they are inimical to health. Decomposing organic matter becomes the culture-bed for various forms of disease unfriendly to the physical welfare of men. Garbage is the "happy hunting ground" for that interesting little creature we call the housefly. But more than a hunting ground—it is the family home; it is there the species is reproduced. I have no scientific knowledge of the fly and cannot speak by the book, but I think I have it on excellent hearsay evidence, that between spring and fall two industrious houseflies can become the proud progenitors of at least nineteen quintillions (19,000,000,000,000,000,000) of lusty maggots. Your reeking garbage pails then or your costly cement receptacles, left half open for five or ten days, to fry and stew and seethe and swelter in an August sun, mean nothing less than the production in your city and neighborhood of countless myriads of wriggling, struggling, developing worms, whose natural duty it is to grow up speedily to fly-maturity, to squeeze their way through your imperfectly screened windows, and introduce poison and death into your home. Think for a moment of the diabolical mission of the fly. His little body, legs and wings, clogged with refuse from the garbage pail and poison from the dirty drain, his ample digestive tract stuffed with a million typhoid germs from the privy vault of the low-down family on the street back of you, pushes his way into

your exclusive home, decorates your spotless window-pane with a pigment more deadly than arsenic, saunters across your table, nibbles the edge off your shortcake, samples your jam, bathes in your glass of milk, buzzes about your sleeping baby, lights upon his rosy lips, and then flies away to poison other neighbors, leaving you, perchance, to weep, in weeks to come, over an irreparable and irreconcilable loss, of whose origin you have not the slightest suspicion. Fleas, too, and gnats and mosquitoes, have likewise their deadly functions, all more or less intimately connected with and encouraged by the presence of garbage, filth and rubbish. The reputation of the rat, as a disseminator of plagues destructive to human life, is well established and needs no emphasis. What we most need to remember in this connection is that the rat greatly appreciates the high living he secures from the rich accumulations of nourishing garbage gathering and standing in our neglected cans, or scattered about the yards and alleys. Numerous well-meant proposals for eliminating the rat have been made, but he will hardly consent to be dispossessed of his present abode while his larder is so well supplied.

Having now come into possession of this vast heap of refuse, it becomes necessary to devise some means of getting it safely off our hands. To accomplish this the modern householder and the modern city usually join forces, the former taking the responsibility of properly depositing it in a place convenient for removal, the latter engaging to effect its decent and unobtrusive collection and disposal. Methods for the disposition of household waste are as numerous and varied as are the cities by which it is produced. As to this a few suggestions only need be made. In many cities the waste is separated into three classes—garbage, ashes and domestic rubbish—deposited in separate receptacles and gathered by different wagons, or at least kept separate. In Detroit, for example, the contract with the Garbage Reducing Company demands that only pure and unadulterated garbage be deposited in garbage cans, 10% of any foreign substance justifying the collectors in refusal to remove. All other refuse—ashes, cans, bottles, papers, *etc.*, may be deposited together in the alley, within 3 feet of the lot line

whence the department of public works undertakes to remove it. It was the original plan of the present commissioner of public works to have ashes kept separate from other rubbish, that such salvage as possible might be made from paper, cans, bottles, *etc.*, but it has been impossible for him to carry out this plan. In Minneapolis the classification is slightly different, the regulation calling for complete drainage of garbage. To avoid pollution of the can, and freezing in winter, it is recommended that garbage be rolled up in waste paper, in small parcels, and placed in the cans, which are to be emptied twice a week. All combustible refuse, such as waste paper, sweepings, cast off shoes and clothing, would seem to be included with garbage, while non-combustible refuse would go with the ashes to the city dump.

In method and frequency of collection there seems to be great diversity. Philadelphia regulations, for example, according to my information, call for daily collection of garbage. Cincinnati varies all the way from daily collections in the business section of the city to once in two weeks in the outlying portions. As to disposition of garbage by the householder the most primitive plan, perhaps, after the savage one of moving away and leaving it, is burial. This is troublesome all the time, impossible in winter, impracticable on small lots, and probably of doubtful sanitary value. Burning is frequently recommended. This method has a large element of sanitary safety, but is destructive of stove or furnace, and on foggy mornings, bad for the neighbors. The next step is the deposit of garbage in old boxes, pails, tubs and washboilers, and of rubbish in boxes and barrels, all to be sorted over and nosed about by hungry dogs, cats and rats, mischievous boys, and thrifty rag-pickers, while waiting for the infrequent and irregular visit of the city collector. The only safe, cleanly, inoffensive and sanitary way yet devised seems to be that of the use of watertight, covered, locking or clamping metallic cans, one for each household, kept safe from trespass and emptied with absolute regularity and if possible daily. The method of final disposition by the city hardly comes within our province as housing workers, unless the primitive one of feeding to cattle, hogs and chickens,

be considered. The shortcomings and perils of this method as a main dependence for garbage disposal must be apparent to every one of us. Reduction and incineration are two methods most practised by modern municipalities, and each has its advantages and its advocates. But neither this nor the ultimate fate of rubbish need concern us.

That accumulations of garbage and rubbish are inevitable, unwelcome and perilous, and must be removed, may be regarded as settled. How to get them removed safely, speedily, regularly, economically, is the crux of the problem. How to shade smoothly the domestic function off into the civic, how to avoid waste of energy, useless experimentation, friction between householder and public official, makes up the question. Every American city has struggled with this problem, most are still struggling, few have satisfactorily solved it. So far as my brief observation goes, the disposal of waste is still largely a failure. And why? I believe this failure is due to two main causes:

1. Lack of a well considered, obviously wise, workable system, a system sufficiently elastic to be applicable as the city grows, to be equally adaptable to the boulevards and the alleys, to be sufficiently economical to come within the reach of all classes of citizens, while not unduly taxing the resources of the city, to be so adjusted as to place the burden of expense where it fairly belongs, not, on the one hand, overburdening the householder, nor, on the other, the municipality, a system which shall be uniform, regular, stable, effective, cleanly, decent, sanitary, and sufficiently independent to be free from the mutations of changing city administrations or the taint of ward or party politics. I have no such complete system in mind to recommend, but I am persuaded that the brains and energy embodied in the great cities of our land are well able to furnish for us such a system for every city.

2. The second great cause for failure, I believe, lies in the almost absolute lack of coöperation—coöperation between the householder and the city departments, coöperation between the departments themselves. This coöperation opens the road to essential and ultimate success.

Let us begin with the department of public works—suppos-

ing this to be the department charged with the disposal of waste. What forms of coöperation with householders can it adopt, must it adopt, to encourage a universal and cheerful response to its needful regulations? First, a system of regular, frequent and thorough collection. Unless it be regular, householders cannot easily, and will not patiently, adapt themselves to it; unless frequent, they will grumble at the cost of extra receptacles, or find themselves overrun with refuse; unless thorough, they will very soon grow indifferent and slovenly or will lose respect for the department as lacking in either seriousness or efficiency. Second, a spirit of accommodation and kindness, a readiness on the part of officers and clerks, as well as of collectors, to give needed information, explanation and assistance. Third, thorough introduction to the entire city of a well-published plan, outlining the duties and privileges of householders, the method and time of collection and any law covering the subject. The publication of such a plan is not sufficiently made by one insertion, along with other council proceedings, in the official daily. Such announcement should be briefly, orderly, attractively, prepared and distributed, and redistributed at least yearly, to every householder in the city. I asked the very faithful, efficient and diligent commissioner of public works in a certain western city, where garbage and rubbish regulations were poorly carried out and alleys were a source of annoyance to the entire public, if he had fully informed the householders as to what the department expected of them. He assured me most solemnly that he had, and, in proof thereof, showed me a notice which he said had been distributed right at the beginning in every house in the city. I looked at it, and was amazed no longer. It was a little narrow slip of thin paper, printed in microscopic type, setting forth, in the stilted and formal phraseology of the law, the city ordinance covering the householder's duties, and the penalty for violation. It was, of course, as plain as day to him, but to the untaught foreigner an enigma and to the average American a formal legal notice which was simply intended to be disregarded and destroyed. Why not a large, stiff card, with a hole to hang it up by and type that human eyes can read, with a little display here and there at important

points, and a big red border, and brief, catchy lines that strike the eye and stick in the memory, and simple English, and a little friendly exhortation? And why not arrange to have these cards supplied at once, and kindly explained, to all new comers? It took us six months in a city where we recently lived, to find out what our duties as householders were with respect to household waste. And then we had to go to the city hall and ask for the information. Of course we could have asked about it sooner, but human nature doesn't usually act that way, and we are all human.

The householder, too, can contribute his part to this work of coöperation. He can seek to learn his duty as a cleanly citizen. He can display a spirit of obedience to law. He can treat with common politeness the requirements of those who perform the pleasant function of removing his refuse. He can take an interest in the welfare of his city as a political entity. He can cultivate such altruism as will embrace the poorest of his fellow-citizens. And he can charge himself with sufficient energy and gumption at least to make a heroic attempt to keep himself and his environs clean.

The police department can perform a much neglected part in this work of coöperation. Why should the activities of the police in behalf of clean yards and alleys be confined to the work of the sanitary squad? Why may not the roundsman on his beat give an eye to conditions of cleanliness, and kindly but firmly instruct his little public, and enforce his city's laws? This, I am told, is a part of the program in European cities, and our immigrants expect it and look with amazement and then disgust at our impotence and stupidity in the enforcement of law.

Not the least important is the coöperation our city councils can render in a steady and manly and adequate support of the city's departments and their officers. How often is an efficient commissioner or health officer handicapped by the puerile and needless changing and shifting about on the part of the city council from one method and expedient to another! The energetic public works commissioner in a city well known to me was recently robbed of all courage and incentive to work for a clean city by the council taking from him all such prerogatives

as could offer him any promise of success. A health officer, to whose wise words you have gladly listened more than once at this conference, recently laid before his city in the public press, in strong and stirring words, backed by irresistible facts and figures, the crying need of his department for a little more money and a few more men, that the city's health might be conserved, its homes safeguarded and the lives of its children preserved. And do you suppose his request was granted? You know before I tell you that, judging by all analogy, he got only a crumb where hunger demanded a square meal. Our city's executive officers are of course but human, and liable to error and subject to temptation, but being human, they long for true success, and if we could only learn to study their problems and encourage their endeavors, and help them a little when they get tired, I believe we could make them better officers and better men, and our city a better city. More than new laws, badly as they are needed, more than the commission form of government which looks promising to me, more than any new-fangled methods of dealing with old troubles, we need genuine, manly, frank, unselfish and charitable coöperation on the part of all citizens, public and private.

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